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Characteristics of Belgian National Life and Politics

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Summary

1. Belgium's political institutions are highly centralized. Local administration has flourished and local institutions and traditions have always been cherished.

2. Among the internal problems which have influenced Belgian life, the language question stands out as the most important. It must be kept in mind when studying any given situation in Belgium. Proclamations and announcements should always be made simultaneously in both Flemish and French.

3. The historic fight for recognition and equal rights of the Flemings has been closely connected with the social development of Belgium and will continue as a vital factor underlying the Belgian political scene.

4. The Catholic Church exercises a great influence in Belgium. Ninety percent of the population is of the Catholic faith.

5. A small number of financial groups, which control the greater part of Belgian industrial output, has had in the past considerable influence upon politics. In post-war Belgium it is safe to say that any working agreements between the government and high finance will occasion great popular mistrust and opposition.

6. A conflict between farmers and city-dwellers has arisen under the German occupation.

7. Belgium's relations with her Allied neighbors are friendly. Hate for the Germans is surpassed only by contempt for the country's own quislings.

8. Three political parties -- the Catholics, the Socialists, and the Liberals -- exercised the principal influence in Belgian political life during the pre-war period. Catholics and Socialists are almost equal in importance. The Communist Party has never been able to win great support; nor have a number of pro-fascist groups been able to attract any real popular backing. The Socialist Party has been working out post-war plans, and a reorganization of the Labor Unions is now under consideration.

9. The position of the Crown in the post-war era constitutes a problem of vital importance. Opposition to King Leopold has been very pronounced in occupied Belgium, especially in the Walloon provinces. However, the government in exile for the first time since it began its exile has recently declared that King Leopold will remain on the throne after the war.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BELGIAN NATIONAL LIFE AND POLITICS

I. INTRODUCTION

Few countries show as distinctly as Belgium the influence exercised by the people on the formation of the internal structure of the nation and its relationship to neighboring countries. Besides these characteristics, certain internal pressures which have come into existence as a result of the nature of the people itself, have further influenced the building of the framework of Belgian society. Every attempt of course to outline in precise words the salient features of an ever changing and growing community is bound to be incomplete and consequently inexact. Therefore, the description given hereafter is only an aid in obtaining a better understanding of the people.

1. Belgium was the first European nation to introduce into its Constitution principles similar to those of the American Bill of Rights and thereby has influenced the composition of all other European constitutions. The individual rights of the citizens were consequently protected against administrative interference.

2. Equally important in a comprehensive picture of Belgian life is the decentralization of the country's administrative structure, which has resulted in considerable autonomy of the municipalities. Unlike the French communes, the Belgian free cities have, from the Middle Ages up to the present German invasion, successfully resisted all attempts toward centralization.

3. Temperamentally, and under any condition, the Belgian dislikes all forms of regimentation. This strong national

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3. Temperamentally, and under any condition, the Belgian dislikes all forms of regimentation. This strong national

characteristic has been heightened during the four years of occupation when Belgians have specialized in all possible ways and means of boycotting or sabotaging Nazi-imposed regulations. This habit, reinforcing their natural temperament, may carry over into the first period of liberation, during which, however friendly they may be toward an Allied decree, they may resist it simply by reflex.

II. LANGUAGE PROBLEM

A. General

There is little doubt that the language question stands out as the most important problem of Belgian life. More than any other single factor, language has exercised its influence on all spheres and domains of Belgian existence. It is, therefore, imperative that the language question should be kept in mind when studying any given Belgian problem.

Basically Belgium can be divided into two distinct linguistic parts: Flanders and Wallonia. The linguistic line runs from Maastricht in the east, westward below Brussels to the neighborhood of Courtrai and Boulogne. Thus, the provinces of Limbourg, Antwerp, East Flanders, West Flanders, and the northern part of Brabant fall within the northern or Flemish group, whereas the remaining part of the country, with the exception of the Eupen district and a small part of Luxembourg, where German is recognized as a national language, is populated by the Walloons. Although Brussels lies in a Flemish region, a large part of the capital speaks either French or both languages. It might be well to point out that this linguistic line, which has remained practically unchanged since the fifth century, does not correspond to any geographical or historical line. Thus both groups have a common past.

Flemish is the national language of the first group and French of the latter. According to the 1930 census, Flemish was the sole language of 42.92 percent of the population, French the sole language of 37.56 percent of the Belgians, and 12.92 percent of the population could speak both languages. It is important to understand that notwithstanding basic differences in origin, language, and character, which at times have led to violent disputes and controversies, both language groups have formed a homogeneous unit as Belgians. Common distress and, specifically, the burden of two invasions in the course of one generation have greatly improved the relationship between the two groups.

B. History

1. Origin. The Flemish are descendants of the Germanic-Frankish invaders who came from the north and northeast and pushed the Walloons southward. The Walloons are of the Celtic or mixed Celtic and Germanic stock which entered Belgium about 300 B.C. The Celts dominated this racial mixture which was Romanized in the centuries following the Roman conquest. Since her independence in 1830 Belgium has theoretically given equal rights to both language groups. Practically the industrial and bourgeois circles in the Walloon provinces have exercised a dominant influence on all affairs of state, as well as on the economic, cultural, and

social life of the country.

This situation was aggravated by the fact that the Flemish upper classes adopted the French language in their daily conversation, and were, therefore, much despised by the rank and file of the Flemings. It thus becomes apparent that the language problem in itself, which originated in the fight for actual recognition and equal rights for the Flemings, is closely connected with the structure of Belgian society, and that the evolution of the language question has followed to a great extent the social evolution of the country.

The rebirth of the Flemish consciousness in the years just prior to the First World War were linked to -- and interwoven with -- the rise of the Belgian Socialist Party and the increased influence of the working class. Until that time, leaders of the Flemish movement had demanded comparatively mild reforms, and did not want to destroy the political unity of Belgium. Their demands were restricted to equal rights in public education, in the army, in the courts, and in all other government services.

During the First World War, some of the Flemish radical elements voiced aspirations for far-reaching political changes, and the advisability of establishing an autonomous Flanders was taken into consideration. When the Germans attacked Belgium in August 1914, Flemings as well as Walloons responded to the call of arms to defend their common good, thus proving how little actual disloyalty to the State of Belgium existed in Flanders. The Germans, well aware of the psychological importance of the language problem, employed every means to exploit the situation and tried to win the support of the Flemings by offering them the long asked for reforms.

Certain Flemish leaders decided to cooperate actively with the Germans in the realization of the Flemish reforms and became known as Activists, whereas those Flemings who refused to accept reforms from the hands of the invaders were called Passivists. Most of the prominent personalities in the Flemish movement were strongly opposed to the Activists and joined the ranks of the Passivists. In 1916 the German occupying authorities granted a few Flemish demands.

Later on, in 1917, a Council of Flanders, Raad van Vlaanderen, was created, which in its initial manifesto proposed to take "measures necessary to secure a hearing of the representatives of the Flemish people at the coming peace conference." The Council formed within its own structure the whole framework of a real government. The activities of the Council, however, were under the immediate and strict control of German officials.

Simultaneously with the formation of this extremist Flemish organization within the occupied territory, the Flemish soldiers in the Belgian army at the front, incited by pro-Flemish and anti-Belgian propaganda, formed an organization which became known as the Front Party. This latter group demanded the division of the Army into Flemish and Walloon regiments and the transformation of the University of Ghent into a Flemish institution. The Activists in the occupied country, on the one hand, and the Frontists in the Army on the other, managed to establish contact in 1916.

It is important to repeat that the rank and file of Flemish society, although strongly in favor of Flemish reforms, were definitely opposed to the activities of the extremists elements which collaborated with the enemy. After the defeat of the German Army, a number of Activists were brought to trial. The judicial proceedings sharpened the language dispute and later on the question of amnesty attracted foreign attention.

2. Between the Two Wars. The period between the two wars was marked by a better understanding by the central government of Flemish aspirations and resulted in -- or was a result of -- the steady development of a Flemish society. The opening of the Flemish University at Ghent constituted a milestone in their struggle. The Flemish factions of the various political parties joined forces whenever a language reform was under consideration, and after many heated debates with their Walloon opponents gradually obtained full recognition. At the outbreak of the Second World War the language problem was virtually settled. The Flemish society had won complete political, economic, and cultural recognition and prominent Flemings in all fields were recognized as leaders together with their Walloon counterparts.

The Flemish movement in itself has thus lost its own character, but a handful of extremists tried to transform the movement into a purely political organization with strong fascist tendencies. The Flemish factions of the constitutional parties broke off relations with the new pro-fascist Flemish movement. The more democratic elements who had not yet joined the various Flemish factions of other political parties, left the movement when fascist tendencies became apparent. The Flemish movement, transformed to a Flemish fascist party, could count on only a small number of followers, although it managed to double its number of voters during the 1930 depression period.

3. Second German Occupation. When Germany attacked Belgium in May 1940, it found a country no longer split by language disputes. The German authorities, remembering the advantages obtained by accentuating the language question during the 1914-18 occupation, tried the same policy in 1940. In the first period of occupation the Germans, hoping to gain the full sympathy and help of the Flemings, followed a policy of complete favoritism toward them. Flemish prisoners of war were released shortly after the occupation of Belgium, while the Walloon soldiers are still in German prison camps. The most important posts in the "New Order" central administration of the country were originally entrusted to Flemish quislings, while the Walloon collaborators obtained only local positions.

Later, when it became obvious that this policy had not produced the expected results, the Germans tried to adopt a line of equality between the two factions. Since the beginning of 1944, there is evidence that the occupying officials have decided to discontinue entirely their support of the Flemings. Everything points to the possibility that greater authority will be centered in Léon Degrelle, the Walloon fascist leader. The German press has started a campaign to prove that the language of the Walloons is closer to German than to French and that the Wallons are historically Germanic.

Although the Germans have not succeeded in dividing the Belgians, there are a greater number of collaborationists in the Flemish part of the country than in the Walloon provinces. No exact figures are available, but reports indicate beyond doubt that the total number of Flemish collaborators represents only a very small minority of the Flemish population. Opposition to the invaders has been equally strong in both parts of the country, although the resistance in the industrial Walloon provinces, with its greater number of communist sympathizers, has been more obvious and more determined in sabotage activities and attacks.

Among the resistance groups the language problem does not in itself play an important part since the patriots' aims are directed exclusively toward expulsion of the invaders and not toward discussions of political ideals. However, the revised tactics of the Germans in the administration of the country has created a language problem in reverse. Whereas the pre-war language question was purely Flemish, the present and immediate post-war situation will reveal a Walloon problem.

The Flemings who have been appointed to official posts since the occupation and those who have collaborated with the enemy will undoubtedly be removed from office, although some Flemish attentistes might be retained. The Walloons on the other hand will have to reenter the field of central administration, where they will oppose the Flemish influence. If liberation of Belgium precedes the defeat of Germany, the position of about

70,000 Walloon prisoners of war will further aggravate the situation and hinder Walloon attempts to regain their former prominence. It should not be forgotten, however, that this Walloon exile is more or less counter-balanced by the number of Flemish labor deportees, who far outnumber their Walloon fellows.

C. Language Problem and Its Impact on Belgian Life

1. Catholic Influence. The importance of the language problem, and the numerous ways in which it affects all strata of Belgian society, cannot be overestimated. Its relationship, for example, to the Catholic Church well illustrates how inextricably the question of language is related to other important characteristics of Belgian society. On one hand, the Church finds a far greater and more devout number of adherents in the Flemish provinces than in the southern part of the country. On the other hand, the Catholics are strongly influenced by the pressure of Walloon financial groups whose support the Church as well as the Catholic Party have long cherished. Until the Second World War the lower hierarchy of the Church was distinctly pro-Flemish, while the higher ranks professed a pro-Walloon sympathy.

After the death of Cardinal Mercier, the Catholic Church in Belgium was placed under the leadership of a Fleming, Cardinal-Archbishop van Roey. Since then the Catholic Church has paid greater attention to the Flemish problem. The attitude of the Church toward the Flemish question has played an important role since the occupation, during which the Catholic Church has adopted a distinctly patriotic attitude and has resisted the German authorities whenever and wherever possible. The Flemish resistance can be explained in part as a result of the stand taken by Cardinal van Roey who, as a Fleming, has a far greater influence on Flemish Catholics than did his Walloon predecessor of the First World War.

2. Language Characteristics. A knowledge and understanding of some of the striking characteristics of both language groups might help to clarify the picture. As to the problem of the language itself, it should be known that Flemish is a Germanic language much like Dutch. The differences between Flemish and Dutch are mainly matters of pronunciation and diction, although small differences in syntax exist. It could be said that Flemish differs from Dutch, as the King's English differs from the English spoken in the United States. The Fleming is very proud of his language, as well as of his culture and history.

The Walloon, in view of the international standing of the French language, does not feel a desire to learn a second language. Most Flemings, in contrast, have a knowledge of French, and the upper classes very often speak English and German. This does not necessarily imply that the Fleming is proud of disclosing this knowledge of languages to a foreigner. His pride in his own language, as well as the entire evolution of the language problem, has made the Fleming very sensitive as to the use of any foreign tongue. Flemings, therefore, expect foreigners to try to make themselves understood in Flemish. However, as soon as the foreigner has demonstrated his good intentions, the Fleming will be glad to speak a foreign language.

3. Conclusions. In conclusion it should be remembered that the language problem runs vertically through both party and social lines. The pre-war sensitivity of the Fleming will, after the occupation, undoubtedly also exist in the Walloon provinces. Proclamations and announcements should always be made simultaneously in both languages, giving top place to the language of the locality according to its position on the officially recognized linguistic line. In the central administration an equal distribution of functions among Flemings and Walloons should, if possible, be maintained. If impossible, persons of the opposite group who have a record of friendly attitude toward the other faction, or persons whose abilities in certain fields transcend any consideration of party or movement would be acceptable. As a result of the high position held by a number of Flemish quislings, the Walloon opposition may prove to be extremely vigorous. That the language problem in Belgian life is only equalled by the pressure exercised by the Catholic Church should also be kept in mind.

III. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

A. Historic Influence

Almost 90 percent of the Belgians belong to the Roman Catholic Church. In rural districts the influence of the local priest transcends the purely religious domain and enters political, cultural, and economic spheres. In the larger cities the Church, although still powerful, has never been able to exercise such strength. A great number of Belgians, especially in the larger cities, while belonging to the Catholic Church, were very much opposed to the influence the Church attempted to exercise in other parts of Belgian society.

The Fleming's traditional inclination toward mysticism is at the basis of his devout religious sentiment. Walloons, on the other hand, display an ability to reach a compromise between native skepticism and the demands of formal religion.

The Belgian Constitution recognizes freedom of religion. Notwithstanding the separation of Church and State, the Catholic Party, as a result of its predominant position in Belgian politics, led the Government to grant religious groups official recognition and financial support.

The Catholic Church has in the passage of time become so strong that it has played an important role in all social issues. Whether it be education, foreign policy, or political parties, its influence has been woven into each problem. The impact of the religious issue on education has been particularly strong. In the realm of business the Catholics created their own labor unions and trade federations.

As a result of the powerful position of the Church among the Flemish lower classes the influence exercised by Catholics on the country's agricultural life has been enormous. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was the Catholic clergy who introduced the cooperative system into Belgian agriculture. The first and most powerful cooperative and agricultural organization was the Boerenbond, which was controlled and directed by the Flemish Catholic Party and by the Catholic Church. Before the war, the Boerenbond was so prosperous that it compared to the Société Générale, a powerful Belgian bank trust.

B. Under Occupation

Since the occupation the Catholic clergy has adopted a highly patriotic attitude. Cardinal Archbishop van Roey, Primate of Belgium, has repeatedly and courageously protested against German measures. The higher as well as the lower clergy, inspired by the example of their Primate, have demonstrated a high spirit of opposition toward the Nazis. Even though the collaborationist ranks have been filled to a large extent by persons who previously belonged to the Catholic Party, this has not affected the prestige of the Church.

In the underground movements, the Church and the Catholic Party have played a predominant role. Opposition led by the Church has commanded the respect of all Belgians, to such an extent that the Communist underground papers on various occasions have thought it wise to compliment the clergy for its stand. This fact in itself, however, has created a new problem. Some circles fear that the increased prestige of the Church will enable it to expand its influence over the post-war structure of Belgian life.

Although the aid and expressed or tacit consent of the Catholic Church would be extremely helpful in the execution of any decree promulgated by the Allies, a close link between the Allied administration and the Church would incite a great deal of suspicion among Belgians at large and should be avoided. However, it must be remembered that the position of the Church is so strong that any decree to which the Church would express its opposition is beyond any doubt bound to fail.

In order not to portray a disproportionate picture of the impact of the Catholic Church on Belgian society it is necessary to point out that the very existence of this religious influence resulted in fairly strong pressure from the opposite camp, which is endeavoring to counter-balance the influence of the Church. This opposition group of free-thinkers is particularly strong in the Walloon provinces and the Brussels area.

IV. HIGH FINANCE AND INDUSTRY

Belgium is relatively the most highly industrialized state in Europe. Belgian industry has been particularly successful in the metallurgical trades (it was the fourth largest European producer of steel), in chemical byproducts of coal processing, in cotton textiles, in glass porcelain and tiles, and in a few "specialities," of which diamond cutting was the most prominent. The country's most important natural resource is coal. Before 1939 it ranked third in coal production among all European states, excluding Russia. Coal was the basis for much of Belgium's manufacturing. The great mineral resources of the rich Congo colony further supported the expansion of Belgium's economy.

This highly developed industry has fostered the creation of large financial combines which in turn have been able to establish powerful industrial trusts. The most prominent among these groups is the Société Générale, which through its banks and affiliated institutions controls Belgium's economic output to an estimated 60 percent of the country's total resources. This same group, which is said to be in control of a still greater proportion of the Belgian Congo, administers about 45 percent of all Belgian bank deposits. Sofina, with its international connections in communications and electric power is another large combine, while the group of the Banque de Bruxelles, with its wide contects in Belgian and colonial industries may be counted as a rival and strong competitor of the other trusts.

It is therefore not surprising that industrial or financial combines of such power have been led to influence Belgium's destiny. Through their hold over all fields of economic life, these trusts have been able in many instances to direct and guide the country's internal and foreign policy. In the past the Belgians have been extremely opposed to these enormously powerful groups. During the German occupation a number of industrialists have collaborated with the enemy, others have adopted an attentiste attitude, and some have opposed the occupying authorities. In post-war Belgium any link with the high finance, no matter how well-intentioned, will incite mistrust and opposition.

V. BELGIAN CONGO

Having acquired the Congo as a colony in 1908, Belgium is one of the youngest colonial powers in Europe. Its late coming into the field explains the absence of a developed colonial consciousness among the Belgians. Belgium's chief concern with the Congo has been an efficient and scientific development of its great mineral resources. A small number of financial and industrial combines have been able to obtain almost complete control over the Congo's economic output.

The benefit obtained from this exploitation not only increased the companies' influence on the country's colonial policy, but also enabled these trusts to expand their hold over Belgium's economic life and indirectly over all affairs of state. Since the capitulation of the Belgian army, Belgians at home have shown more interest in their Colony. The knowledge that the Congo supplies the Allies with essential war materials has given the people the conviction that their country is still actively engaged in the war. In the Congo, political disputes which developed immediately after the surrender of the Belgian forces between the Governor General of the Congo and the Belgian Government in exile, have now been resolved.

VI. FARMERS

The relationship between farmers and the urban population was satisfactory in pre-war Belgium. Four years of occupation have, however, created a new tension between them. While the city-dweller has had to suffer under a severe food shortage, the farmer has not felt its full impact. This situation was aggravated because a number of farmers sold their surplus food on the black market at exorbitant prices. At the end of 1943 the situation became so bad that the underground movement had to warn the farmers of the consequences of such a policy and appealed to them to reduce their prices on the black market.

VII. ATTITUDE TOWARD FOREIGNERS

A. The English

Belgian feeling toward the inhabitants of other countries has sharpened since the occupation. Respect and admiration for the British have increased significantly since the outbreak of the war. For the Belgians the English are the symbol of resistance, and, therefore, the symbol of liberation. Belgians have acquired a new and highly developed faith in the British. Information transmitted by them is accepted without further investigation.

B. The Americans

The American is respected as a good friend. American relief work of the last war did much to enhance the reputation of Americans as generous people. Influenced by the theater and the exaggeration of facts and figures which has always characterized the continental conception of the United States, Belgians have lost their faith in American statements. The Belgian, therefore, expects Americans to bluff and to exaggerate and will tend not to take any of his statements at face value. To a certain extent the Belgian likes these exaggerations and considers them typical of the country. He therefore points them out as a sympathetic characteristic, but he still discounts their validity.

C. Neighboring Countries

The marked friendship which always existed between the Belgians and the French and, more specifically, between the Walloons and the French has been greatly affected by the trends of the war. The French ministry's attack on Belgium at the latter's military capitulation, the French surrender, and the establishment of a pro-fascist regime in Vichy has stirred up a feeling of deep contempt. The stand taken by de Gaulle, on the other hand, has again raised their spirits and has incited all Belgians to admiration and respect. France, in the symbol of de Gaulle and his movement, has managed to command the respect even of those classes of Flemish society which prior to the war were very lukewarm toward France. The attitude of the Belgians toward post-war France will therefore depend entirely on the structure of France's post-war government.

Belgium's relations with the Netherlands have greatly improved during the last decade. A common basis for understanding and mutual respect has developed and has created the best of relationships between the two countries.

Hatred for Germany is universal and extreme. Belgian hatred is directed not only against Nazis, but also against Germans without distinction. This hatred against Germans is only surpassed by contempt for the Belgian quisling and the organizations created by him.

VIII. POLITICAL PARTIES

A. Introduction

The foregoing description of the general characteristics of the people as well as of the influence exercised by certain groups on the structure of Belgian life, finds its reflection in the political framework of the country. Belgium, like most European countries, has a multi-party system. Three political groups, the Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals obtained in the last elections 85 percent of the total seats in the Chamber of Representatives. The Catholics and Socialists, in the recent years before the war, polled an almost equal number of votes. In the elections of 1939, these two parties together secured 75 percent of the total seats in the Chamber.

After the First World War and up to 1935 the structure of the various Belgian governments reflected a predominant Catholic influence. Most Cabinets were formed by a coalition between Catholics and Liberals. The Socialists, heretofore under the influence of their more orthodox leaders who had up till then steadily rejected cooperation with a bourgeois government, decided to join the coalition Government in 1935 in order to fight the growing threat of fascism. A separate Flemish and Walloon faction was represented in each coalition Party. The fascist parties however did not follow this pattern. The Flemish Nationalist group (VNV) based its program entirely on a Flemish-fascist platform and there was therefore no common cause between the VNV and the pro-Flemish factions of the other parties. The Rex group started as a specific Walloon party, but then tried to obtain some influence in the Flemish provinces. Soon afterwards, however, this fascist party had to limit its activities to Wallonia.

The development of the coalition cabinets, the first of which was established in 1935 by Paul van Zeeland, has been influenced by several major issues. First was the language question. Due to the structure of the political parties, this problem did not constitute a strictly political issue, although it was a source of continued and repeatedly heated debates.
This basic problem however was overshadowed by the second issue of foreign policy. The old orientation which was decidedly pro-Allied and in favor of alliances with France and Great Britain,

rapidly gave way under stress of the international events to a policy of neutrality. Discussions on this subject caused sharp dissension within the coalition parties, especially within the Socialist Party. Thirdly, disunity within the Socialist ranks took an accentuated form as a result of the 1930 depression and centered around the adoption of de Man's full employment program. This party controversy soon extended to a split between the capitalist and workers' representatives in the Government. Finally, increasing agitation on the international front and the subsequent fear of becoming involved in a new war, brought the coalition parties closer together, and during the 1939 elections the traditional constitutional parties regained the confidence of the population.

The distribution of party adherence is indicated in the following list which shows the 1936 results of the election for the Chamber of Representatives.

Provinces	Catholic and Christian Democrat	Socialist	Liberal	Communist	VNV	Rex	Total
Brabant	11	13	7	3	2	6	42
Antwerp	12	10	3	-	3	1	29
East Flanders	12	8	3	-	4	2	29
West Flanders	9	7	2	-	4	-	22

Provinces	Catholic and Christian Democrat	Social-ist	Lib-eral	Com-munist	VNV	Rex	Total
Limbourg	5	-	1	-	3	-	9
Liége	4	10	2	3	-	5	24
Hainaut	6	16	4	3	-	3	32
Namur	2	4	1	-	-	2	9
Luxembourg	2	2	-	-	-	2	6
Total	63	70	23	9	16	21	202
Compared to previous election:							
Gain				6	8	21	
Loss	16	3	1				

In the 1936 elections the extremist VNV as well as the Communists made important gains, and the pro-fascist Rex Group for the first time presented its candidates for election. The above chart, therefore, clearly indicates from which districts comes the greatest support for the extremists groups. During the elections in 1938 the Rex Party lost seventeen of its twenty-one seats, while the VNV won one seat and the Communist maintained the status quo. The Catholic Party regained ten seats and consequently came back to its usual place at the top of the list.

B. Catholic Party

The Catholic Party was the strongest in the country and secured in most elections a slightly higher number of votes than the Socialists. In 1936 a reorganization of the Catholic Party took place. A Catholic Bloc was formed with an almost autonomous Flemish Catholic branch and an equally autonomous branch in the French-speaking districts of the country. The Christian Democrats, representing the Catholic Labor Federations, had independent local organizations, but also belonged to the Flemish or Walloon section of the Bloc.

In domestic policy the Bloc advocated conservative social reforms, adequate national defense, and requested state subvention for the Catholic schools. In recent years the Catholics have not been able to maintain their former control of the educational program of the country. In foreign affairs the Bloc approved the policy of freedom from alliances advocated by the King's Speech in 1936. The Christian Democrats and the factions of the Bloc that represented the interests of the Catholic Labor Federations, supported repeatedly the progressive policy of the Socialist Party. The Flemish Catholic representatives took an active part in the discussions of the language problem and prominent members of the Party defended linguistic reforms in the educational and social program. During the depression the Catholics lost sixteen of their seats in the Chamber of Representatives, a loss partly regained in the 1939 elections.

C. Socialist Party

The Socialist Party, known in Belgium as the Labor Party, usually obtained almost as many votes as the Catholic Party. The industrial Liége and Hainaut districts and the densely populated provinces of Brabant and Antwerp were the principal centers of

Socialist activities. The program of the Socialist Party was anti-clerical. It represented the interests of the Socialist labor unions and advocated a policy of socialization of the essential means of production. Although following a progressive social-democratic policy, the Belgian Socialists had no revolutionary program. They were, therefore, strongly opposed to the Communists.

In foreign policy the Socialists favored the program of the Second International, and, until a few years before the war, they asked for limitation of armaments and a policy of collective security. Under pressure of international events the Socialists supported Belgium's neutrality policy. The acceptance of this neutrality policy caused a split within the Socialist Party.

1. Young Socialists. The younger socialist elements, under the leadership of Henri de Man, were opposed to the orthodoxy of the founders of the Belgian Socialist Party and especially of its leader Emil Vandervelde. Vandervelde was not only the strongest representative of the basic ideals of the founders of the Party in Belgium, but also the symbol of the Second International and its leading figure in all European Socialist Parties. Whereas Vandervelde was of the opinion that Belgium could best be served by promoting the interests of the international working class, the younger socialists such as Spaak and de Man were essentially Belgian nationalists.

During the depression period the results of the elections showed a decline in socialist votes. The party then adopted, after heated debates between the younger and the older elements, a new program of economic reform, known as the Plan du Travail (Labor Plan) and, because of its author, as the Plan de Man.

2. Under Occupation. After the capitulation of the Belgian army, the Labor Party went through a period of great confusion, which was aggravated by the betrayal of Henri de Man, president of the party. Soon afterwards, however, the patriotic elements of the Socialist movement within the country, aware of what had occurred, resumed their activities clandestinely, and finally in 1942, during a two days' underground convention at Namur, the Belgian Labor Party was reconstituted under the name of the Socialist Party.

The new leaders elected at Namur immediately established contact with party members who had escaped to London, in order to discuss the plans for a new program. This program calls for a reorganization of the party on a federal level, thus creating separate Flemish and Walloon groups and a special section for the Brussels area, which also will be divided into two language groups. The underground convention, moreover, came out for a closer understanding between the new Socialist Party and the more radical elements of the Catholic Party.

This rapprochement would be effected by granting the Catholics the right to establish parochial schools with subsidies paid by the central government; provided that the schools accept State supervision. Consideration was also given to a complete reorganization of the Socialist Youth Movement. However, the party made its most significant post-war plans in the field of trade union organization and labor unionism.

Prior to the war, the Belgian Labor Party was closely linked to the Socialist Labor Federation, (Confédération Générale du Travail de Belgique) with its twenty-six affiliated organizations and a total membership of over 570,000. Each of the three constitutional political parties in Belgium had a separate labor federation, which was closely associated with its own mutual benefit organization and cooperative society. The Socialist Party's new plan, which has been worked out by special study committees in collaboration with their representatives in London, provides for a unified labor union movement in the post-war era.

It is hoped that the unification of labor policy will eliminate confusion among Belgian labor during the immediate post-war period and will at the same time pave the way for co-operation with the labor movements in other European countries. It is obvious that such a collaboration will necessitate a severance of relations between the union and the respective political parties. The plan, furthermore, recommends a centralized form of organization of the labor movement in preference to a regional or provincial administration. The Socialist representatives have also agreed to sacrifice their own mutual benefit associations, which prior to the war had a membership of over one million, in order to organize a general system of social security, which will take over the functions formerly fulfilled by the mutual aid societies. Aware that Belgium's post-war economy will be influenced by central planning and control of prices and wages, the Socialist Party believes that the labor union will have to re-examine pre-war collective bargaining policies.

It is known that the Socialists in Belgium, as well as their friends in London, have approached the Catholic labor representatives in order to discuss their plan. It is reported that certain members of the Catholic Party are somewhat reluctant to relinquish their influence over the Catholic Labor Federation, although they would favor the establishment of permanent inter-union committees for the creation of common programs and propaganda.

D. Liberal Party

The Liberal Party represented the upper middle classes and the large business interests. Its influence in Belgium's political life was greater than is indicated by its numeric strength. Although the Liberal Party also had a Flemish faction, it can be said that it was largely anti-Flemish and anti-clerical.

In domestic policy the Liberals advocated a strong national defense. In foreign policy, they favored a Franco-

Belgian cooperation against Germany. The Liberal Party in Belgium represented the more conservative element of the country.

E. Communist Party

The Communist Party, which was formed by revolutionary elements expelled from the Socialist Party, has never been able to gain a strong foothold in Belgium. The mining and industrial districts of Liége, Hainaut, and Brabant were the centers of communist activities. During the depression, the Communists tripled their number of seats in the Chamber of Representatives.

F. Fascist Parties

A detailed outline of the aims and the development of the two pro-fascist Belgian parties will be given in a separate guide. It suffices, therefore, to point out that the Rex Party is a fascist group which presented its candidates for the first time during the 1936 elections.

The chief support of the Rex Party came from the middle class circles in the Walloon districts. The initial success of the Rex group in the 1936 election was largely at the expense of the Catholic Party. Léon Degrelle, leader of the Rexists, attacked practically everyone who had been in power, and has never yet clearly defined the Rex Party's program on foreign or domestic policy.

The Flemish National Socialist Party (VNV) started, as explained in the description of the Flemish movement, as a

Frontist Party formed by discontented Flemish soldiers of the 1914-1918 war. The VNV has never won great support among the Flemish people, even though during the depression it doubled its number of seats in the Chamber of Representatives.

C. Political Parties under Occupation

Under German occupation the constitutional parties, together with the Communist Party, have been prohibited. The leader of the Socialist Party, Henri de Man, is the only prominent representative of the three constitutional parties who has proclaimed his faith in a German victory. He has been publicly denounced by the Belgian Socialist leaders residing in the free countries. Under the influence of the military operations, de Man, as well as other quislings, have tried to shift to safer grounds. The Rex and the VNV are the only pre-war parties which have been maintained under the occupation; the others however soon went underground and thus continued their activities.

Each underground party publishes its own clandestine paper in which its aims and goals are reflected. But little is known of the exact development of the political parties nor of their immediate post-war plans. It should not be forgotten that a clandestine paper portrays only the opinion and aspirations of a small number of persons, since it is practically impossible to maintain, through underground channels, smooth working communication between different localities. Nor is it easy to gauge reliably the sentiments of the people, and the shifts in the evolution of opinion of the population in an occupied territory. Therefore, each underground political party speaks for its own restricted number of immediate collaborators and not for the entire party. Nevertheless, it has become apparent that a strong movement to the left has occurred during the occupation. It can be expected that the post-war election will show a distinct increase in Communist and Socialist votes at the expense of the Liberal Party and conservative Catholic Party. However, the Catholic Democrats may share a substantial gain with the Socialists.

1. Communist Influence. At present, the Communists have been able to organize a powerful underground. But adherence to this resistance group as well as the sympathy expressed for them by large parts of the population should not be taken as proof of an increase in Communist sentiment in the country. Many Belgians basically opposed to the ideals and methods of the Communist Party in time of peace, have joined the underground ranks of the Communist Party or have professed their sympathy for them, because they realized that the most effective resistance to the Nazis had been organized by the Communists. To a great number of Belgian patriots the effectiveness of the opposition transcends any political ideal. These Communist supporters will, therefore, not necessarily remain connected with a post-war Belgian Communist Party.

2. Other Political Parties. The trend in public opinion in the occupied country further indicates a distinct decline

in followers of the conservative Liberal Party. Under the stress of the occupation, issues and problems have become clearer and more distinct. The Belgian people are tending toward sharper political distinctions without endless discussions and deliberations. The platforms of the more radical parties such as the Socialist, Christian Democrats, and the Communist will, therefore, correspond to popular ideals. The opposition to pressure groups and more specifically to high financial circles will be strong. Some well informed persons believe that the financial trusts are so much aware of this trend in public opinion that they will be very cautious in trying to exercise any influence in post-war Belgium. Other circles, following public opinion with an eye to the proportional importance of each development, claim that the Sociétè Générale and the other combines, by the mere extent of their holdings, will maintain at least a strong part of their pre-war influence on Belgian politics.

IX. GOVERNMENT IN EXILE

A study of public opinion lacks clarity without an analysis of the position of the Belgian government in exile. At the outbreak of hostilities on 10 May 1940, Belgium had a government of national union, formed early in January 1940, and composed of five Catholics, four Socialists, three Liberals, and two technicians. This apportionment fairly well reflected the political complexion of the country as shown in the elections of April 1939.

With the advance of the German armies the ministers were compelled to proceed to France, and when King Leopold surrendered to the Germans on 28 May 1940, the Cabinet, largely due to extreme pressure brought by Premier Reynaud, issued a formal condemnation of the King's action. Hubert Pierlot, the Belgian Prime Minister, then set up his government in Paris, where it was recognized by France and Great Britain as the only legal government of Belgium. During the days of the fall of France, its headquarters were set up successively in various French towns.

The activities of the Belgian Government immediately following the capitulation of France are not yet altogether clear. Camille Gutt, Minister of Finance, and August de Vleeschauwer, Minister of Colonies, had already left France for England, but it was not until some time after the armistice that Pierlot and Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak reached London. Speculation as to the reason for their delay has been inconclusive. Some of the other members of the Belgian Cabinet, who had returned to occupied Belgium after the capitulation, have since been able to escape to London, but not all of them have been taken back into the government.

A. Political Affiliation

The members in London were strongly opposed to accepting Ministers who had been known in pre-war days for anti-democratic sympathies. At present the Belgian Government in London is composed of four Catholics, three Socialists, one Liberal (who holds a post as Under-Secretary of State) and one Non-Parliamentarian specialist. It includes:

Position	Name	Party Affiliation
Prime Minister Minister of National Defense:	Hubert Pierlot	Catholic
Minister of Colonies:	Albert de Vleeschauwer	Catholic
Minister of Finance Minister of Economic Affairs:	Camille Gutt	Non-Parliament
Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Commerce:	Paul-Henri Spaak	Socialist
Minister of Justice Minister of Information:	Antoine Delfosse	Catholic
Minister of Interior:	Auguste de Schrijver	Catholic
Minister of Public Works Minister of Communications:	Auguste Balthazar	Socialist
Under-Secretary of State for Education:	Jules Hoste	Liberal
Under-Secretary of State for Refugees, Labor, and Social Welfare:	Bondas	Socialist

The Members of Parliament who are in London have grouped together with the former members and their one-time colleagues to form a Parliamentary Office presided over by Camille Huysmans, the pre-war Socialist Mayor of Antwerp. Furthermore, an Advisory Council of the Government was established. It is composed of the members of the government, including the Under-Secretary of State and the members of the Parliamentary Office.

This Advisory Council can in no way be compared to a parliamentary organ. Apparently, many of the members of the group participate simply out of deference to the Government, without any conviction of the efficacy of the body. Furthermore, the government in exile established various separate councils, such as the Juridical Council, the Superior Council of Education, Committee on Repatriation, etc.

It should be noted that the Belgian government in exile is formed by ministers who were in office on the day of the invasion of the country and thus were appointed by King Leopold and confirmed by a freely elected Parliament. New ministers have not been added to the government during its period of exile, although some specialists have been given posts as Under-Secretary of State and State Councillor.

B. Post-war Influence

Camille Gutt, the non-Parliamentarian Minister of Finance and Defense, and Paul-Henri Spaak, the Minister of Foreign Affairs are, undoubtedly, the two strongest figures in the government in exile. Hubert Pierlot, the Cabinet's Prime Minister is respected for his political honesty, but has little authority over his colleagues. In the first days of its establishment Belgians at home definitely mistrusted their government in London. Failure of the government in exile to comprehend the situation in the occupied country was at the basis of the people's dislike for their representatives abroad. With the advance of the Allied military operations and in step with a growing faith in an early liberation of the country, Belgians at home have come to realize the importance of being officially represented in England as a member of the United Nations.

The ministers of the government in exile are aware that their chances of reappointment, after their planned initial resignation on their return to Belgium, are rather slim. It is generally believed, however, that the first post-war government cannot be formed exclusively of persons who have lived in the occupied territory, and that the cooperation of specialists who have been in a position to follow international affairs at close range will be necessary. Thus Paul Henri-Spaak, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government in exile, would be the most likely candidate for the post-war cabinet. It is not impossible that Spaak, as a shrewd political observer, would prefer to refrain from playing an active part in Belgian politics in the first period after the liberation in order to be better prepared to re-enter the field at a more opportune moment.

Among the prominent Belgians now residing in Allied countries the names of Paul Tschoffen, Jef Rens, and Pierre Ryckmans are most frequently mentioned as probable candidates for portfolios in a post-war government, while Paul van Zeeland and Georges Theunis are also among those whose names are to be taken into consideration. It is obvious, however, that the importance to Belgium's post-war political life of the various personalities residing in Allied countries is only second to that of the men now active in occupied Belgium and whose names are not yet known.

X. KING LEOPOLD

A. Introduction

At the center of Belgium's post-war readjustment problems is the abdication of King Leopold. The solution given to this question will have an impact not only on Belgium's own political structure, but also on all her relations with the rest of the world. Unlike most other internal disputes in Belgium, the issue created by Leopold originated as a direct result of the war. A brief review of its historic background will facilitate an understanding of the problems involved.

B. King Leopold's Pre-war Position

The political framework of Belgium is closely modeled on that of Britain. According to the Constitution, the King is at the same time Chief Executive and Commander in Chief of the Army. He countersigns all laws, but responsibility to the legislative branch rests exclusively with the Council of Ministers.

When Leopold ascended to the throne, the monarchy was solidly based on the foundations laid by Albert. From the start of his reign, Leopold made a serious attempt to fulfill his role as Chief Executive according to the noblest tradition, but obstinacy, ambition, and perhaps this very desire to serve his country led him to take a decisive part in the politics of the nation. It is certain that he soon began to overstep the powers of a constitutional monarch by exerting pressure on political questions.

In national affairs Leopold demonstrated a special interest in the Flemish problem. In foreign affairs his feeling of indifference toward France undoubtedly influenced his attitude in 1936 when he advocated the freedom from foreign alliances which inaugurated Belgium's neutrality policy. The democratic elements in the country disapproved of Leopold's tendency to intervene in such questions.

C. King Leopold during the Campaign

The state of tension between the Crown and the Cabinet became apparent only in the first days of the invasion. The focal point was the constitutional position of the Crown in time of war. King Leopold considered himself first as Commander in Chief of the Army, whereas his ministers maintained the sovereign was first Chief of State and only as such exercised the duties of Commander of the Army.

This difference of opinion had its immediate effect on the conduct of the war, and was also fundamental to the discussion between the Ministers and the King on the position of the Crown in case of surrender. While Leopold thought it his duty as Commander in Chief to share the fate of his army, the Ministers expected the King, as Chief Executive, to escape rather than to let himself fall into the hands of the enemy. When military necessity finally forced the capitulation of the Belgian army, King Leopold surrendered and was made prisoner of war. It is important, however, to point out that the capitulation was a purely military act and that the King did not sign any document of a political nature.

D. King Leopold since the Capitulation

The period immediately following the surrender of the

Belgian army was somewhat confused. Leopold's decision to remain with his people was interpreted by the nation during the first period of occupation as an example of self-sacrifice. In step with military events, public opinion in occupied Belgium underwent drastic changes. The King's apparent indifference toward the fate of the thousands of deported workers disappointed the lower classes, and his weak protest at a later date did not alter their attitude.

In addition, the influence exercised on the King by a number of his closest advisers, whose political ideals and ambitions were rightly considered as hostile to a democratic monarchy, was widely criticised. Nor was the announcement of Leopold's second marriage well received by the Belgian people. The fact that he married a commoner, though probably harmful to his prestige, was not the principal point of dispute. The main objection of the Belgians was that the King, who wanted to be considered and honored by them as a prisoner of war, should marry at a time when other prisoners were not allowed such privileges.

At present the Belgians realize that the position of their prisoner-King is less fortunate than that of the Chiefs of State of the other occupied countries. Some circles definitely feel that he has lost his post-war right to the throne. It is difficult from a distance to judge popular sentiment in an occupied country, but it seems certain that, while the Belgians have not lost their faith in monarchy itself, a number of Belgians feel that Leopold will have to abdicate. The Walloon provinces and especially the Liége district are reportedly the center of opposition to Leopold.

E. Observations

The complexity of the monarchical problem is increased by the dilemma with which the country will be faced if Leopold abdicates. The complicated internal political structure of Belgium makes it difficult to choose a Regent who would have to be appointed if Leopold's fourteen-year-old son, Prince Bauduin, should succeed him.

In the underground movements the position of the King is not discussed. The patriots maintain that the monarchical problem is one to be settled by the country after its liberation. In London, however, a representative of one of Belgium's largest underground movements, Front de l'Indépendance, has made a public request for the abdication of Leopold.

In April 1944 the Belgian Government in exile for the first time since it began its exile in 1940, has openly declared that King Leopold will remain on the throne after the country's liberation. Until then the Belgian cabinet members in London when referring to the Crown conspicuously omitted to mention the name of King Leopold. It is known, however, that most members of the Belgian cabinet in London are personally opposed to Leopold, but afraid of losing their official recognition by the Allies, they never made a statement against the King.

The cabinet as a body, notwithstanding the personal opinions of its members and aware of the difficulties which an abdication of the King would create, prefers to keep Leopold on the throne after the liberation of the country, provided he will agree to act with strict constitutionality. The latest official backing of King Leopold by the Government in London raises the question whether the Cabinet members have been able to obtain clarification on this subject from the King.

Moreover, it appears certain that if Leopold is to remain, he will have to dismiss a number of his closest collaborators. General van Overstraeten, Leopold's chief military adviser, is known for his authoritarian sentiments and is in favor of a strong concentration of power in the King's hands. Count Capelle is supposed to have been entirely favorable to collaboration with the Germans. It remains doubtful whether Leopold can be used as a rallying point for the nation at the time of liberation. The possibility that the Germans may deport the King to the Reich, if Belgium is invaded, must also be taken into consideration.